

Gender inequalities in unpaid public work: Retention, stratification and segmentation in the volunteer leadership of charities in England and Wales

David Clifford 

Department of Social Statistics and Demography, Social Sciences, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK

Correspondence

David Clifford.

Email: david.clifford@soton.ac.uk

Abstract

While gender inequalities in employment (paid public work) and domestic and reproductive labour (unpaid private work) are a prominent focus within the sociological literature, gender inequalities in volunteering (unpaid public work) have received much less scholarly attention. We analyse a unique longitudinal dataset of volunteer leaders, that follows through time every individual to have served as a board member (trustee) for a charity in England and Wales between 2010 and 2023, to make three foundational contributions to our understanding of gender inequalities in unpaid public work. First, the salience of vertical gender stratification and horizontal gender segmentation in trusteeship shows that gendered inequalities in work extend to public work in general—encompassing unpaid public work, and not only paid public work. In terms of gender segmentation, we find that women are over-represented as trustees in a small number of fields of charitable activity but under-represented across the majority of fields. In terms of gender stratification, we find that women are under-represented on the boards of the largest charities; under-represented as chairs of trustee boards; and particularly under-represented as chairs of the largest charities. Second, the dynamics underlying gendered

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differences in unpaid public work, which show higher rates of resignation for women trustees, resonate with research on paid employment which emphasises the importance of attrition to an understanding of how gendered inequalities in work are reproduced. This means that increasing the retention of women, not only the recruitment of women, becomes central to the policy agenda. Third, we show that there has been a decline in gender stratification and gender segmentation in trusteeship since 2010. This decline over time in gendered inequalities in unpaid public work provides an interesting counterpoint to influential research documenting a 'stall' in the reduction of gendered inequalities in paid employment.

KEYWORDS

gender, longitudinal, segmentation, stratification, unpaid public work, volunteering

1 | INTRODUCTION

There is a rich and extensive body of sociological research exploring the many ways in which work is gendered. One key lesson of this body of sociological research is the recognition that—'if we want to understand gender differences and divisions' in work - we need to consider *'both paid and unpaid work'* (Bradley, 2016, p. 73; emphasis added). This recognition stems from feminist critique which challenged the previous marginalisation of unpaid domestic and reproductive labour within conceptions of 'work': housework and childcare in the private sphere came to be seen as a form of work, alongside paid work in the public sphere. This means that gendered divisions in work should be understood across the total social organisation of labour—encompassing responsibility for childcare (reproduction) and domestic labour (consumption) as well as paid employment (production) (Glucksmann, 1995).

However—and importantly—'until relatively recently voluntary work has been something of a footnote in the sociology of work' (Taylor, 2016, p. 486). Therefore, while unpaid private labour has come to be regarded as integral to the study of work, unpaid public labour—or volunteering—is largely 'missing from studies of work' (Taylor, 2016, p. 486), such that voluntary work is 'arguably the most ... under-researched type of work in sociology' (Edgell et al., 2016, p. 8). This reflects a de facto dichotomy in conceptual and empirical research within the sociology of work: work has been considered as either paid and located in the public sphere or unpaid and located in the private sphere (Parry et al., 2006; Taylor, 2004). Significantly, volunteering—defined as unpaid productive activity outside the household in the public domain (Musick & Wilson, 2008; Taylor, 2016)—does not fit this dichotomous model of work 'that polarises [paid] employment and domestic labour' (Taylor, 2004, p. 31). Indeed, while the study of volunteering has grown significantly in recent decades, much of this is policy-focused and there is relatively little cross-fertilisation with the literature on the sociology of work (Taylor, 2016). Therefore the study of volunteering 'has developed independently of the study of paid work: ... theory building and research into paid and [volunteer] work are largely undertaken separately' (Overgaard, 2019, p. 129). Importantly, this has hindered the potential for learning across literatures on the theme of gendered inequalities in work: for example, to what extent are patterns of gender segmentation and gender stratification that are evident in paid employment also found in volunteering? There is limited empirical evidence on this theme since, while gender inequalities in employment (paid public work)

and domestic and reproductive labour (unpaid private work) are a prominent focus within the sociological literature, gender inequalities in volunteering (unpaid public work) have received much less scholarly attention.

2 | LITERATURE: GENDER INEQUALITIES IN PAID AND UNPAID WORK

2.1 | Gender and paid public work: Stratification and segmentation in paid employment

There is an important and long-established tradition of sociological work on gender inequalities in paid employment (e.g., Blackburn & Jarman, 2006; Bolton & Muzio, 2007; Collischon & Eberl, 2021; Crompton, 2006; Hakim, 1992; Kanter, 1977). While there has been a significant increase in the proportion of women in paid employment since the middle of the twentieth century, key inequalities remain. Women remain disproportionately concentrated in the lower levels of organisations, with men disproportionately concentrated at higher levels (Crompton, 2006). Women are also over-represented in certain fields of employment, particularly in 'caring' jobs in education and health (Pilcher, 1999). Hakim (1992) refers to the former relative concentration of women in lower grade positions within an industry or organisation, with men relatively concentrated in managerial positions, as 'vertical segregation'; and refers to the latter over-representation of women in particular types of occupation as 'horizontal segregation' (see also Blackburn & Jarman, 2006). Similarly Bolton and Muzio, 2007, p. 54) emphasise the importance of both 'vertical' *stratification*, 'where women are excluded from senior positions', and 'horizontal' *segmentation*, 'where women are condensed in certain feminized specialisms'.

A host of empirical studies have illustrated and emphasised the salience of these twin dimensions of gender inequality in paid employment. In terms of vertical stratification, Bushell et al. (2020, p. 1) point to the under-representation of women in leadership positions in the workplace—arguing that, over 4 decades following Kanter's (1977) landmark study of men and women in corporations, 'women in positions of power are still the exception rather than the rule'. In terms of horizontal segmentation, Blackburn and Jarman (2006) emphasise the pervasive tendency, across industrialised countries, for women to be concentrated in certain occupations and under-represented in others. Meanwhile studies of particular professions document how, even where women are well-represented numerically overall, vertical stratification and horizontal segmentation remain important (Powell & Sang, 2015). Thus the research agenda has shifted from a concern with 'exclusion' to a concern with 'inclusion but without equality' (Muzio & Tomlinson, 2012, p. 460). For example, Bolton and Muzio's (2007) study of gender inequality in the legal profession documents how, in terms of vertical stratification, women represent a growing proportion of salaried solicitors but are under-represented at partner level; and, in terms of horizontal segmentation, women are over-represented in a narrow range of 'female' specialisms, such as family, employment and personal injury law. In the teaching profession, in terms of vertical stratification, women are less likely to occupy senior positions despite being a majority overall; in terms of horizontal segmentation, women represent an overwhelming majority of primary teachers, a small majority of secondary teachers, and a minority of higher education academics (Bolton & Muzio, 2008). In management, despite numerical progress overall, there remains a pattern of stratification whereby women are under-represented amongst the leaders of large corporations and a pattern of segmentation where women are concentrated in less prestigious 'female' specialisms (Bolton & Muzio, 2008).

Note that these gendered patterns of inequality are also found in paid employment within the voluntary sector. Indeed as Lee (2019) emphasises—despite a perception that, compared to the for-profit and government sectors, women face better prospects for career advancement in the voluntary sector—women are under-represented in managerial positions within nonprofit organisations, and particularly under-represented in managerial positions within the largest nonprofits (Lee & Lee, 2021; Lennon, 2013; Sampson & Moore, 2008; Themodo, 2009). This pattern exists despite the over-representation of women in the voluntary sector paid workforce as a whole (Faulk et al., 2013; McCarthy, 2001; Themodo, 2009), reflecting the fact that women are over-represented in lower-level voluntary sector paid employment (Teasdale et al., 2011).

2.2 | Gender and unpaid private work: Unequal sharing of domestic and reproductive labour

Women perform the majority of unpaid private work (Edgell et al., 2016). Indeed, in the majority of households cross-nationally, women 'bear the major responsibility' for domestic and reproductive labour, in terms of both housework and childcare (Bradley, 2016, p. 82). This gendered division of labour has remained persistent despite increases in women's participation in paid employment and increases in women's educational attainment over recent decades (Cooke, 2021). It is important to emphasise the inter-relationships between the realms of paid public work and unpaid private work: understanding gender inequalities in one sphere promotes understanding of gender inequalities in another (Parry et al., 2006). Indeed Andrew et al. (2021, p. 3) argue that 'gender differences in the sharing of unpaid [private] work—including the sharing of childcare, other care work, and housework—shape much of the unequal outcomes we see in the labour market: a deeply uneven division of unpaid [private] work makes it hard to achieve equal outcomes in paid work'. Similarly Laperrière and Orloff (2018) point to the connection between women's unpaid private work responsibilities and the associated barriers to women's opportunities in paid employment. Bradley (2016, p. 88) concludes that it is the mutual relationship between—on the one hand—'domestic and reproductive labour' and—on the other—'paid work in the labour market' that 'lie[s] at the heart of gender inequalities'.

2.3 | Gender and unpaid public work: The 'invisibility' of gender inequalities in volunteering

In contrast to the long-established tradition of sociological research on gender inequalities in paid employment and in unpaid private work, sociological research on gender inequalities in unpaid public work is relatively scarce. Indeed - as Taylor (2004, p. 31) points out - for most of the twentieth century 'the concept of work within sociological definitions and empirical studies [was] synonymous with paid employment', reinforcing a conceptual dichotomy between the public sphere as the site of 'economically productive industrial labour' (regarded as 'work') and the domestic sphere as the site of family activities (not regarded as 'work'). While feminist critique subsequently challenged the marginalisation of domestic labour - such that housework in the private sphere came to be recognised as a form of work, alongside paid work in the public sphere (Glucksman, 1995)—the dichotomy itself remained 'firmly in place' within the sociological literature, with relatively little empirical research on unpaid labour in the public domain (Taylor, 2004, p. 33). This renders 'invisible or marginal' potentially substantial parts of individuals' working lives (Taylor, 2004, p. 34) and stands in contrast to a conceptual understanding which emphasises that what constitutes a work activity 'is not whether it is paid but whether it involves the provision of a service to others or the production of goods for the consumption of others' (Taylor, 2004, p. 38). From a gender-based perspective the result has been that, while gender inequalities in paid employment and in domestic and reproductive labour have been well documented, much less is known about the nature of gender inequalities in unpaid public work or 'volunteering' (Rotolo & Wilson, 2007). Indeed a recent influential review of research on gender inequalities in work made no mention of gender differences in volunteering (see Platt, 2021). This is despite the fact that—as Taylor (2004) points out—volunteering is not a marginal activity: 37% of adults volunteered formally with an organisation in 2019/2020 (Martin et al., 2021).

The lack of empirical research on this theme has also reflected a lack of data: for many years, the infrastructure of official data collection has been orientated towards providing information about the state, the market, and households. In contrast, as the UK Statistics Authority (2012) have recognised, there has been an acute shortage of statistics and quantitative research about civil society, the voluntary sector and unpaid public work or 'volunteering'. In particular, there has been no obligation for government to collect data on the protected characteristics of charity trustees,¹ the c.900,000 volunteer leaders who make up the trustee boards of the c.160,000 registered charities² in England and Wales. Therefore, while there is concern that there are salient gender-based inequalities in the volunteer

leadership of the charitable sector, until now there has been no research which has been able to examine this issue empirically. Indeed a group of 65 prominent organisations concerned about a potentially 'massive diversity problem' in the volunteer leadership of charities recently wrote an open letter to the Charity Commission, the regulator of charities in England and Wales, asking for more research on this theme. They highlighted the invisibility of inequalities by gender, and other protected characteristics, in unpaid work: in response to the question 'to what extent are there gender inequalities in the volunteer leadership of charities?', they concluded that 'ultimately, unlike [with respect to paid employment] in the public sector and .. the private sector, we just don't know' (Preston, 2022).³ This paper seeks to make visible the nature of these inequalities for the first time.

3 | THEORY

We present two theoretical perspectives about the extent to which gender inequalities manifest in paid employment, and in unpaid private work, might also be found in unpaid public 'volunteer' work. These two theoretical perspectives are each based on considering how volunteer work relates to other work spheres. One theoretical perspective emphasises the unpaid nature of volunteer work, contrasting to the paid nature of employment. A second theoretical perspective emphasises the public nature of volunteering, contrasting to the private nature of unpaid domestic and reproductive labour.

3.1 | Volunteering as unpaid work: Unequal sharing of labour?

One theoretical perspective emphasises the unpaid nature of volunteering. From this perspective, unpaid public time pursuits are different from paid work. Unlike paid employment, or indeed domestic and reproductive work, volunteer work is 'voluntary', involving free choice. Therefore, as Rotolo and Wilson (2007, p. 559) outline, 'according to this argument, neither men nor women need conform to the pattern of sex segregation found in other work spheres'. Indeed, under the 'contrast' hypothesis, there may be a basis for expecting very different patterns of stratification and segmentation to paid employment. In terms of vertical stratification, unpaid charitable activities have traditionally been an arena in which women could pursue 'invisible careers,' climbing to senior positions of responsibility traditionally less available in the context of paid employment (Daniels, 1988; Rotolo & Wilson, 2007). Similarly McCarthy (1990) emphasises that the voluntary sector has historically provided a context for women to pursue opportunities for participation and leadership not available in other spheres. Indeed there is considerable historical evidence for the importance of women in expanding charitable service provision (McCarthy, 2001; Themodo, 2009). Taylor (2016, p. 4991) describes how historically, in contrast to wage labour, unpaid roles were constructed as the only 'legitimate' positions open to women in the public sphere. Therefore—just as it is fundamental to consider the inter-relationships between the realms of paid public work and unpaid private work: understanding gender inequalities in one sphere promotes understanding of gender inequalities in another (Andrew et al., 2021; Bradley, 2016; Laperrière & Orloff, 2018; Parry et al., 2006)—so it is important to consider how the realm of unpaid public work relates to gender inequalities in other realms. From this perspective it is possible that more limited opportunities for women in paid employment in business and government serve to promote the higher participation or 'hyper-involvement' of women in unpaid public work (Themodo, 2009). Indeed if paid employment is 'moulded' around male participation to such a degree that advancement for women is limited, unpaid public work is less a 'choice' for women but more reflects an absence of alternatives in the public sphere (Overgaard, 2019, p. 137). Women's involvement in voluntary work may be further reinforced by institutional processes that serve to elide 'unpaid work' in general—not only unpaid private work—as 'women's work' (Taylor, 2004). Indeed institutionally, from an historical perspective, the volunteer role has been gendered, underpinned by the ideology that legitimated the male breadwinner household and facilitated by the withdrawal of the wives of upper and middle class men from the paid labour force (Musick &

Wilson, 2008). Structurally, this gendered volunteered role has been reinforced in a patriarchal context where women are expected to 'take care of' those in need in both informal and formally organised settings (Crompton, 2006; Musick & Wilson, 2008; Teasdale et al., 2011). Culturally, as a result of socialisation, women score more highly than men relating to motivations to volunteer—including measures of empathetic concern, religiosity, prosocial role identity and moral obligation (Fyall & Gazley, 2015). Together these institutional, structural, and cultural factors may lead to predictions that women perform the majority of volunteer work (Beechey, 1987).

3.2 | Volunteering as public work: Gendered stratification and segmentation?

A second theoretical perspective emphasises the public nature of volunteering. As Brown & Ferguson, 1995 (1995, p. 160) explain, 'public domain characteristics include primarily civic, professional, organizational, public, community, extra-domestic, bureaucratic, and formally rational dimensions; private domain characteristics are familial, intimate, informal, personal, nurturant or preservative, and household related'. Institutional and social processes allocate roles differently to men and women, with women more likely to undertake low-status, nurturing roles in the private sphere (Platt, 2021) and with women having a 'harder time than men being accepted as actors on the public stage' (Musick & Wilson, 2008, p. 176). Therefore—while there may be institutional, structural and cultural reasons for expecting high numbers of female volunteers overall—inequalities may persist in terms of the *kind* of volunteer work that women do (Musick & Wilson, 2008). From this perspective, under the 'spillover' hypothesis, we might expect gender inequalities in unpaid volunteer work, just as in paid employment. In terms of vertical stratification, in particular, we might expect women to be under-represented in unpaid leadership positions. Culturally, social-psychological mechanisms may serve to reproduce gender inequality through cross-situational gendered status expectations that serve to exclude women from leadership roles (Risman, 2018). Thus unfounded cognitive biases that stereotypically ascribe certain traits to men, including competitiveness, ambition, assertiveness, confidence, decisiveness and agency, are those characteristics that may be considered important for successful leadership; while traits stereotypically ascribed to women, including nurturance, interpersonal sensitivity, and communality, are not so typically associated with leadership positions (Kowalewska, 2020). Structurally, the hierarchical way in which unpaid volunteer roles are organised according to their authority and decision-making responsibilities—into 'governance' (including serving on a trustee board), 'operational' (service delivery), and 'support' roles; in a division of labour not dissimilar to paid employment—provides a context in which these gendered cultural cognitive biases can be readily imported (Rotolo & Wilson, 2007). Institutionally, the time-intensive demands of volunteer leadership roles - in which on average charitable trustees devote 5 hours per week to their roles (Lee et al., 2017) - may not be compatible with women's disproportionate household and care responsibilities (Fyall & Gazley, 2015). The institutional context may also affect the vertical stratification of unpaid work through the way in which trustees are recruited. Since over 90% of charities recruit most trustees informally through social networks (Lee et al., 2017), if women have weaker connections to such networks they may be less likely to be recruited to unpaid leadership roles (Kowalewska, 2020).

Risman (2018, p. 29) draws on Connell (1987) to argue that gender relations may be distinct within different social institutions: 'gender regimes within the same society might be complementary, but not always'. Therefore ultimately it is an empirical question about the extent to which gender inequalities manifest in paid employment, or the unequal sharing of labour found in unpaid private work, might also be found in unpaid public 'volunteer' work. This paper provides important empirical evidence on this theme.

4 | RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This is the first study - in any national context—to examine the gender composition of charitable trustees across the whole population of charities in a country. Therefore basic questions remain unanswered in existing work.

- *Overall estimate.* What percentage of charitable trustees in England and Wales are women?
- *Recruitment and retention.* To what extent are any gender differences in trusteeship the result of fewer women being appointed, or the result of women having an increased risk of resignation?
- *Stratification.* To what extent is there vertical 'gender stratification' in trustee board composition? First, do a lower percentage of women serve on the boards of the largest charities compared to the percentage serving on the boards of the smallest? Second, do a lower percentage of women serve as chairs of the trustee board compared to the overall percentage serving as trustees?
- *Segmentation.* To what extent is there horizontal 'gender segmentation' in board composition across different fields of charitable activity?
- *Aggregate trends.* How has the percentage of women serving on trustee boards changed over time?
- *Trends in recruitment/retention, stratification and segmentation.* To what extent are there changes over time in any gender differences in trustee recruitment and trustee retention? Is there evidence for a decline in gender stratification? Is there evidence for a decline in gender segmentation?

This paper answers these questions for the first time.

5 | DATA AND METHOD

We construct a unique longitudinal dataset of charitable board members that follows through time every individual to have served as a board member for a charity in England and Wales between 2010 and 2023. To construct this dataset we use information from the Charity Commission's Register of Charities, which includes a list of the name of every current board member of every currently registered charity. We obtain 14 historical annual snapshots of the Register of Charities for each of the years 2010–2023 inclusive. We append together each of these annual lists of charity board members and match common board number names for the same charity across years. The online Supporting Information provides details of this matching process. The resulting longitudinal dataset provides, for every board member for every charity, their years of service as a board member between 2010 and 2023.

The Register of Charities lists the title and name of each trustee. We identify the gender of the trustee in two ways. First, we link the first name of each trustee from the Register of Charities to the online GenderChecker database. The GenderChecker database, compiled from 2001 to 2011 UK census data, contains 102,240 unique names, each of which is classified as male, female or unisex.⁴ Second, for unisex names not classified as male or female using GenderChecker, we examine the title of the trustee, identifying titles for men and women.⁵ Using these two methods we are able to identify the gender of 95% (2,588,852 of 2,709,755) of the trustees identified as serving on a charitable trustee board between 2010 and 2023: 90% were identified using GenderChecker, with the remaining 5% identified using titles.⁶ Similarly we are able to identify the gender of 95% (861,962 of 911,554) of currently active trustees serving in 2023. Note that we tested the robustness of GenderChecker by examining the titles of those trustees identified as men or women using the GenderChecker database. There was total correspondence between the two methods of identifying gender: where men and women could be identified using both methods (i.e., with a non-unisex name and a gendered title), 100% of those identified as men using GenderChecker had male titles and 100% of those identified as women using GenderChecker had female titles.

Our final dataset includes information on 861,962 trustees serving in 2023 and 2,588,852 trustees to have served between 2010 and 2023, with 1,441,381 appointments and 1,546,581 resignations over this analysis period (Table 1). To our knowledge - in terms of the number of volunteers analysed - this study represents the largest longitudinal study of volunteering yet undertaken in any country.

TABLE 1 Number of observations by covariates.

	Cross-sectional: 2023		Longitudinal: 2010–2023 inclusive		
	No. board members	%	No. board members	Appointments	Resignations
Gender					
Men	448,922	52	1,294,616	672,207	756,156
Women	413,040	48	1,294,236	769,174	790,425
Size of organisation (£ annual income ^a)					
0–10k	210,509	24	608,444	285,221	327,984
10k–100k	322,570	37	958,659	556,209	596,159
100k–1 m	216,905	25	686,558	438,923	452,121
1–10 m	51,409	6	168,634	110,810	114,089
10m+	16,117	2	54,185	36,419	37,934
Missing ^b	44,452	5	112,372	13,799	18,294
Field of charitable activity (ICNPO) ^c					
Culture and recreation	95,957	11	288,740	165,973	176,001
Development	39,941	5	135,607	72,651	80,995
Education	42,397	5	141,317	83,899	89,111
Employment and training	6859	1	25,446	14,019	15,239
Environment	26,001	3	75,463	41,742	44,507
Grant-making foundations	38,033	4	92,329	42,859	44,070
Health	26,414	3	88,480	48,424	52,283
Housing	17,026	2	52,217	28,486	30,669
International	23,821	3	61,209	28,793	30,055
Law and advocacy	19,937	2	67,797	37,985	39,747
Other	102,093	12	153,557	49,525	49,819
Parent teacher associations	32,110	4	164,478	104,347	121,804
Playgroups and nurseries	16,582	2	123,142	88,419	92,804
Religion	167,044	19	481,869	284,648	306,325
Research	15,304	2	47,806	26,842	28,298
Scout groups and youth clubs	29,478	3	87,069	54,076	55,661
Social services	119,840	14	373,793	194,327	206,903
Umbrella bodies	4697	1	19,675	11,449	12,751
Village Halls	38,428	4	108,858	62,917	69,539
Total	861,962	100	2,588,852	1,441,381	1,546,581

^aFor longitudinal analysis, size is measured by average income over the analysis period.

^bIncome data are missing for newly registered organisations yet to report an annual income.

^cICNPO: International Classification of Nonprofit Organisations.

5.1 | Definition of measures

We begin by examining the overall percentage of trustees (board members) that are women:

$$(n_{w,i} / (n_{w,i} + n_{m,i})) * 100 \quad (1)$$

where $n_{w,i}$ is the number of trustees that are women, and $n_{m,i}$ the number of trustees that are men, in year i over our analysis period 2010–2023.

For the year 2023 we also consider the percentage of trustee board chairs that are women:

$$(c_{w,2023} / (c_{w,2023} + c_{m,2023})) * 100 \quad (2)$$

where $c_{w,2023}$ is the number of board chairs that are women, and $c_{m,2023}$ the number of board chairs that are men, in 2023.

We consider vertical *stratification* through examining, first, how the percentage in (1) varies according to the size of the charity⁷ and, second, through comparing Equations (1) and (2) to consider whether a lower percentage of trustee chairs are women compared to the overall percentage serving as trustees. We consider horizontal *segmentation* through examining how the percentages in Equations (1) and (2) vary according to the field of charitable activity, using the International Classification of Nonprofit Organisations (Salamon & Anheier, 1992).

In our longitudinal analysis we consider the percentage of trustee appointments that are women:

$$(a_{w,i} / (a_{w,i} + a_{m,i})) * 100 \quad (3)$$

where $a_{w,i}$ is the number of trustee appointments that are women, and $a_{m,i}$ the number of trustee appointments that are men, in year i .

We also consider the rate of resignation⁸ (or annual probability of resignation) for women

$$r_{w,i} / y_{w,i} \quad (4)$$

where $r_{w,i}$ is the number of women resigning from trustee positions, and $y_{w,i}$ the total number of years served on the board by women, in year i . Similarly the rate of resignation (or annual probability of resignation) for men is

$$r_{m,i} / y_{m,i} \quad (5)$$

The gender resignation ratio, defined as the rate of resignation for women/the rate of resignation for men, is then given by:

$$\frac{r_{w,i} / y_{w,i}}{r_{m,i} / y_{m,i}} \quad (6)$$

6 | RESULTS

At the aggregate level there is an approximate cross-sectional *symmetry* and temporal *stability* in the gender composition of trustee boards in England and Wales. In terms of symmetry, 47.9% of charitable trustee roles in 2023 are held by women (Table 1). In terms of stability, this represents a small increase from a figure of 45.9% in 2010 (Figure 1). However - importantly - this aggregate *symmetry* and *stability* hides salient dimensions of gender inequality in terms of trustee *retention*, *stratification* and *segmentation*.

6.1 | Inequalities in retention, stratification and segmentation

In terms of trustee retention, between 2010 and 2023 the rate of resignation for women is 0.146 (Figure 2, bottom panel). In contrast the rate of resignation for men is 0.119. Therefore the rate of trustee resignation for women is 22.6% higher for women than for men. Note that this difference in the rate of resignation by gender does not reflect compositional differences in the size and type of charity served by men and women. On the contrary: the higher

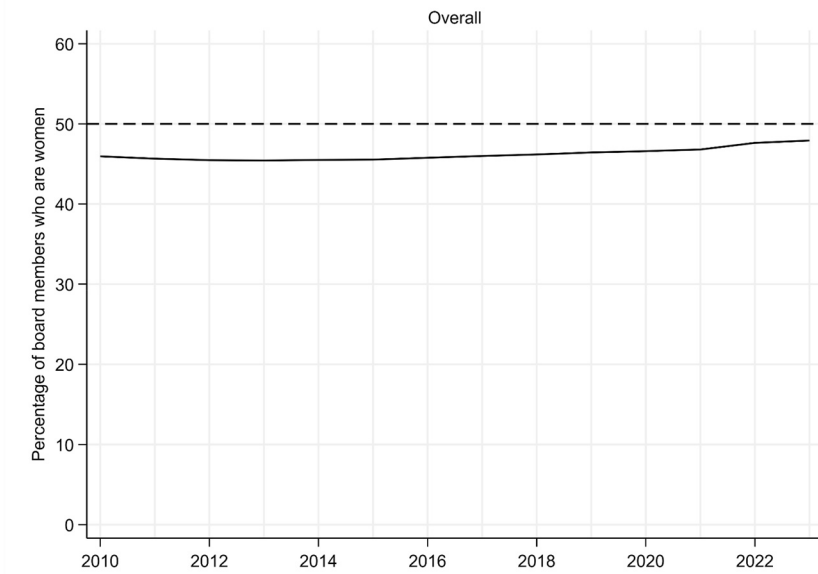


FIGURE 1 Trend in the percentage of board members who are women, all charities. Horizontal axis: year; vertical axis: percentage of board members who are women. The solid line presents the trend; the dashed line provides a comparison to the 50% level.

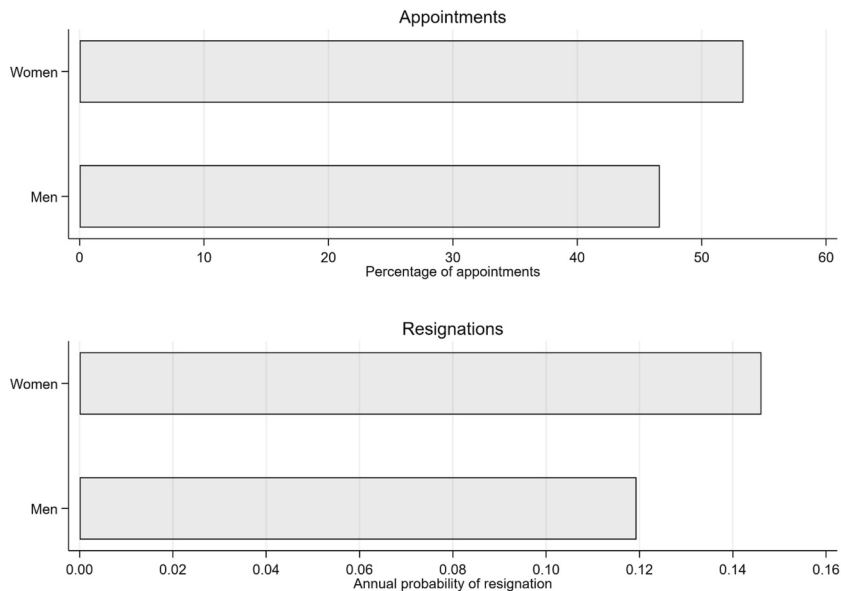


FIGURE 2 Percentage of appointments, and annual probability of resignation, by gender over the analysis period 2010–2023.

rate of resignation for women over the analysis period is pervasive across all sizes and types of charity. This helps to explain the relative stability in the gender composition of trustee boards across the population of charities as a whole (Figure 1). Even though more women than men are appointed as trustees over our analysis period - the percentage of appointments who are women is 53.3 across charities as a whole (Figure 2, top panel)—the higher resignation rate

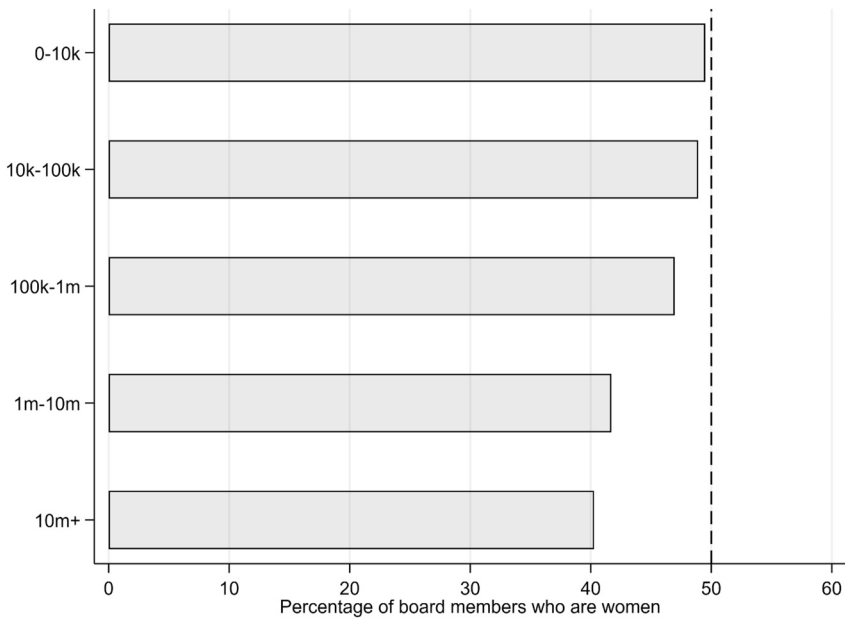


FIGURE 3 Percentage of board members who are women, by size of charity (£ annual income). The dashed line provides a comparison to the 50% level.

of women means that this higher number of appointments does not translate into women representing the majority of the population of trustees as a whole.

In terms of stratification—in which women are under-represented in more senior positions - there is evidence for two dimensions of inequality. First, while women are more equally represented among the boards of smaller charities, they are in a minority among the boards of larger charities. Thus for charities with an annual income of under £10k, women make up 49.5% of trustees and for charities with an annual income of £10k-£100k, women make up 48.9% of trustees (Figure 3); in contrast, for charities with an income of £1m-£10m, women make up 41.7% of trustees and for charities with an income of over £10m, women make up 40.3% of trustees. Note therefore that, since smaller charities make up the majority of the population of charities (Table 1), the aggregate gender composition - in which 47.9% of all trustee roles in 2023 are held by women—largely reflects the more equal representation among smaller charities and hides the under-representation of women among the boards of larger charities. Second, women are in a minority in the leadership of the charitable boards: only 37% of the chairs of trustee boards are women. Importantly these two dimensions of stratification interact, such that women are in a particular minority as chairs of the largest charities: while women make up 39.0% of the chairs of boards for charities with an income of under £10k, they represent only 29.9% of the chairs of boards for charities with income of over £10m (Figure 4).

In terms of segmentation, women are over-represented in board positions in a small number of fields of charitable activity, but under-represented across the majority of fields. Thus women make up 84.9% of trustees of charitable playgroups/nurseries, and 83.0% of trustees of Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) (Figure 5). They also make up 57.8% of trustees of charities working in (economic/social/community) development, and 53.5% of trustees of village halls. However they make up less than 50% of trustees of charities working in every other field, with the lowest shares of women trustees in grant-making foundations (39.7%), and charities involved in research (40.1%) and in culture and recreation (41.4%). Therefore the aggregate gender composition - in which 47.9% of all trustee roles in 2023 are held by women—is affected by the over-representation of women in a small number of fields and hides the under-representation of women among the boards of charities working in the majority of fields. Note that such segmentation is particularly evident amongst board chairs (Figure 6): while 84.0% of the chairs of boards of PTAs are

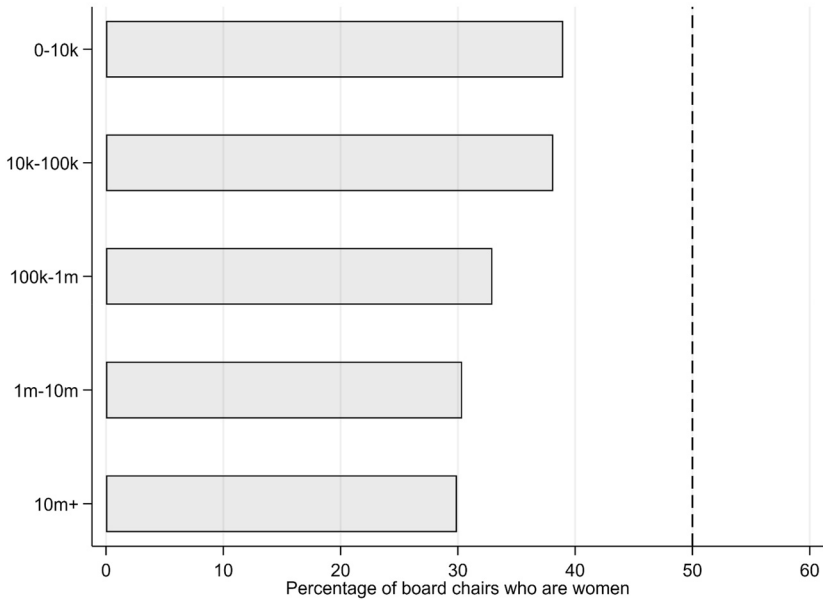


FIGURE 4 Percentage of board chairs who are women, by size of charity (£ annual income). The dashed line provides a comparison to the 50% level.

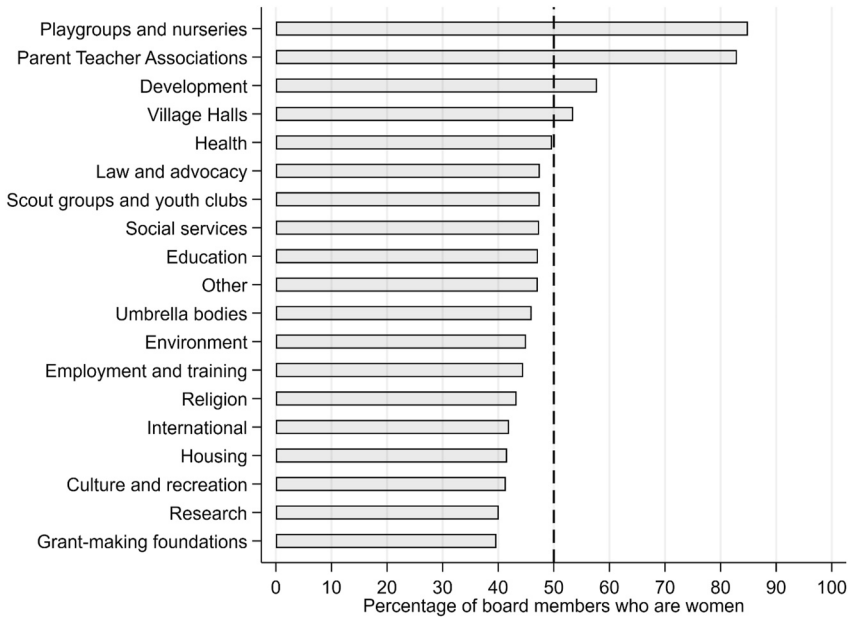


FIGURE 5 Percentage of board members who are women, by field of charitable activity. The dashed line provides a comparison to the 50% level.

women, and 79% of the chairs of playgroups/nurseries are women, women represent the minority of chairs in every other field of charitable activity, with the lowest shares of women chairs for charities involved in religion (23.4%), grant-making foundations (25.9%), and charities involved in housing (29.6%).

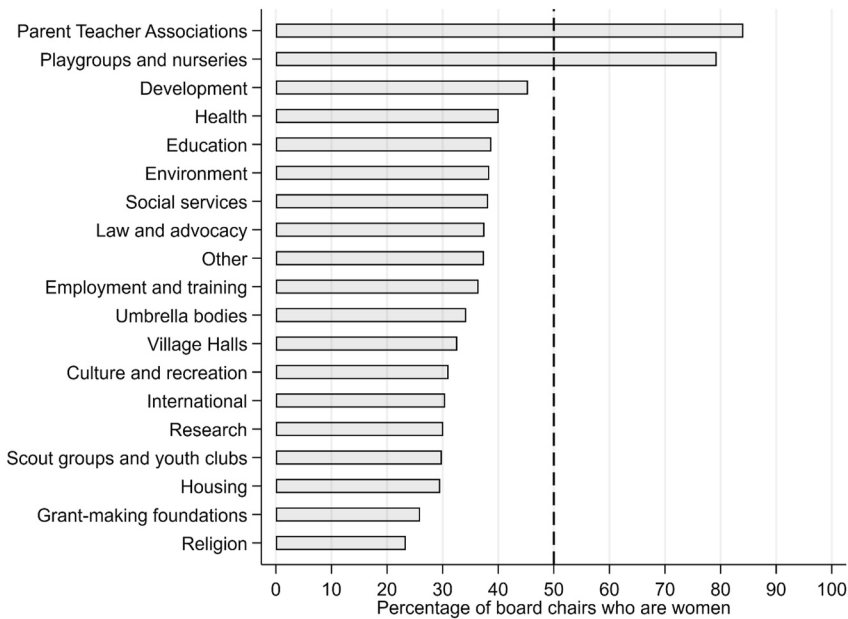


FIGURE 6 Percentage of board chairs who are women, by field of charitable activity. The dashed line provides a comparison to the 50% level.

6.2 | Trends in retention, stratification and segmentation

Is there evidence for change over time in the three salient dimensions of gender inequality - trustee *retention*, *stratification* and *segmentation*—that we have identified? In terms of trustee retention, while over the period 2010–2023 as a whole the rate of trustee resignation for women is 22.6% higher for women than for men (Figure 2, bottom panel), there has been a decline since 2010 in the extent to which women are more likely to resign. We calculate the gender resignation ratio for each year. In 2011 the gender resignation ratio is 1.29, such that the rate of trustee resignation is 29% higher for women; in 2023 the gender resignation ratio is 1.11, such that the rate of trustee resignation is 11% higher for women (Figure 7). Meanwhile, in terms of trustee appointments, while over the period 2010–2023 as a whole the percentage of appointments who are women is 53.3 (Figure 2, top panel), there has been a small increase in this figure since 2010. In 2011 52.2% of appointments are women; in 2023, 55.9% of appointments are women (Figure 8). Therefore the small increase in the aggregate percentage of trustees who are women—from 45.9% to 47.9% from 2010 to 2023—reflects both an increase in women being appointed and a decrease in the extent to which women are more likely to resign.

In terms of stratification, while in 2023 women are still in a minority among the boards of the largest charities (Figure 3), there has been a sizeable increase in their representation since 2010. Indeed, for charities with an income of £1m–£10m, women make up 33.1% of trustees in 2010 and 41.7% of trustees in 2023; for charities with an income of over £10m, women make up 30.2% of trustees in 2010 and 40.3% of trustees in 2023 (Figure 9). Note that the share of women on the boards of the more numerous smaller charities has increased much less sizeably (Figure 9), underlying the small increase across charities as a whole in the percentage of trustees who are women (from 45.9% to 47.9%; Figure 1). Note too that the sizeable increase in the share of women on the boards of larger charities largely reflects a sizeable increase in women being appointed to the board: for charities with an income of £1m–£10m, women make up 37.7% of appointments in 2011 and 49.7% of appointments in 2023; for charities with an income of over £10m, women make up 33.2% of appointments in 2011 and 46.3% of appointments in 2023 (Figure 10). Meanwhile there are relatively small changes in the gender resignation ratio for larger charities (Figure 11). In contrast,

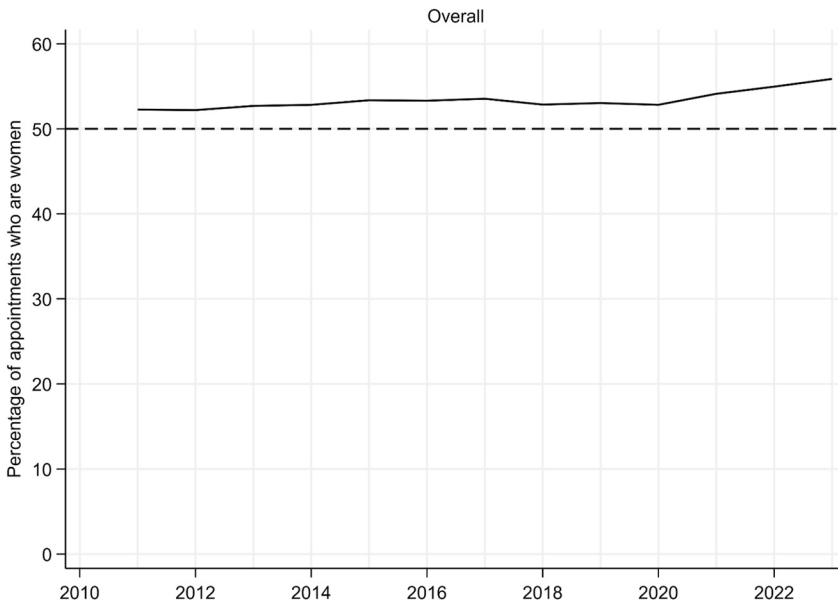


FIGURE 7 Trend in the percentage of appointments to the board who are women, all charities. Horizontal axis: year; vertical axis: percentage of appointments who are women. The solid line presents the trend; the dashed line provides a comparison to the 50% level.

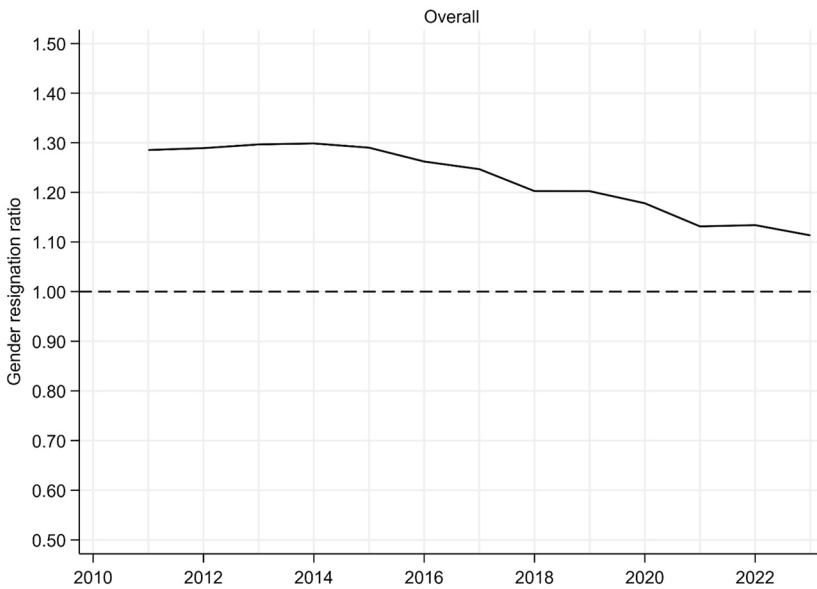


FIGURE 8 Trend in the gender resignation ratio (rate of resignation for women/rate of resignation for men), all charities. Horizontal axis: year; vertical axis: ratio expressing rate of resignation from the board for women/rate of resignation from the board for men. The solid line presents the trend; the dashed line provides a comparison to a ratio of 1 (where the rate of resignation for women = the rate of resignation for men).

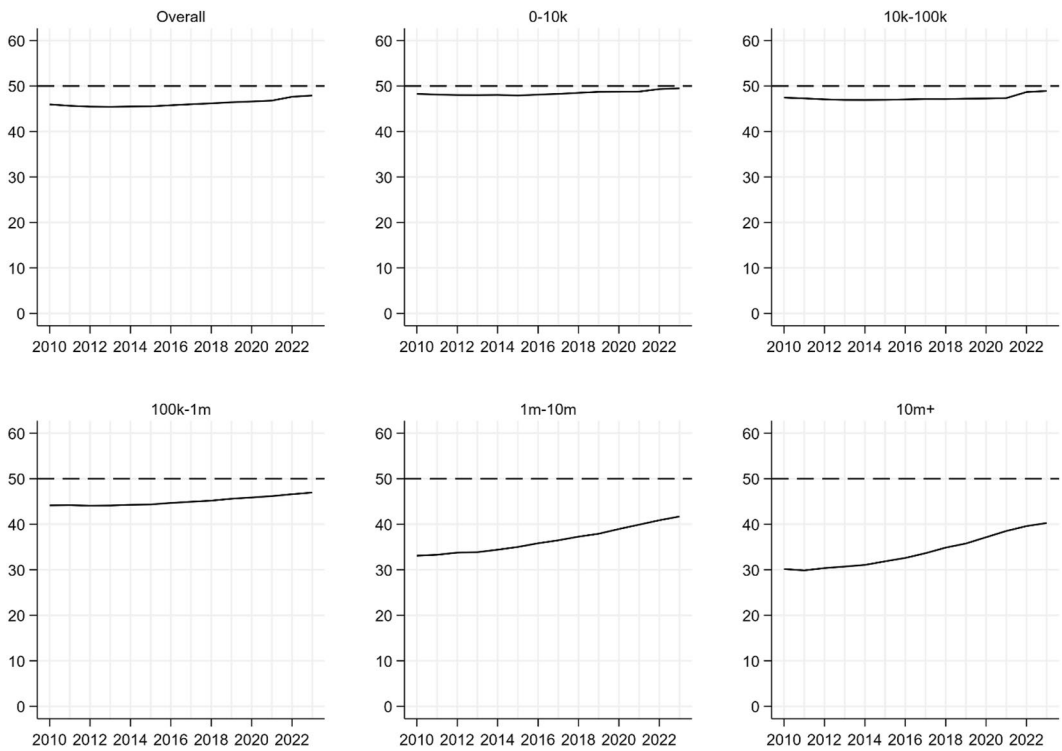


FIGURE 9 Trend in the percentage of board members who are women, by size of charity (£ annual income). Horizontal axis: year; vertical axis: percentage of board members who are women. The first panel presents the overall trend for comparison. The solid line presents the trend; the dashed line provides a comparison to the 50% level.

there has been a sizeable decline in the gender resignation ratio for smaller charities (Figure 11), reflecting a decline in the extent to which women are more likely to resign.

In terms of segmentation, while in 2023 women are still over-represented in a small number of fields of charitable activity and under-represented across the majority of fields (Figure 5), in these under-represented fields there has been an increase in the percentage of trustees who are women since 2010 (Figure 12). Specifically there has been an increase in the percentage of women in charities involved in: culture and recreation (37.0%–41.4%); education (40.2%–47.2%); employment and training (38.9%–44.5%); the environment (39.2%–45.0%); grant-making (34.8%–39.7%); health (47.2%–49.6%); housing (38.8%–41.6%); international activities (39.1%–42.0%); law and advocacy (42.2%–47.5%); religion (36.6%–43.3%); research (31.8%–40.1%); scout groups and youth clubs (45.3%–47.5%); social services (44.2%–47.3%); and umbrella bodies (43.0%–46.0%). There have also been increases in the percentage of women in some fields where women already represented the majority of trustees in 2010: from 51.2% to 53.5% for village halls, and 80.7%–82.9% for PTAs. The only fields that see a decline in the percentage of women are development (62.6%–57.8%) and playgroups/nurseries (89.3%–84.9%). In general, segmentation declines over the period: all fields in which women are under-represented show an increase in the share of women trustees, while two of the four fields in which women are over-represented show a decrease. This decline in segmentation reflects the trend in appointments (Figure 13): all fields, with the exception of development and playgroups/nurseries, show a small increase in the percentage of appointments who are women. For some fields of activity - the environment, international activities, religion, research, social services and umbrella bodies - a decline in the gender resignation ratio also contributes to the increase in the percentage of women on boards (Figure 14).

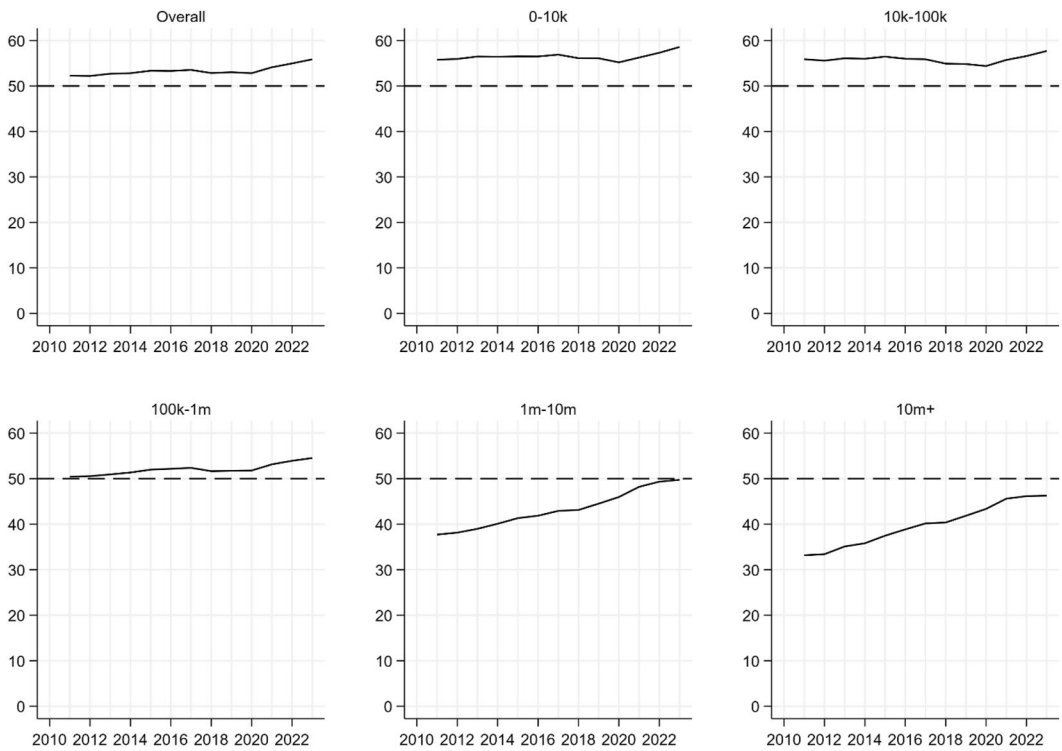


FIGURE 10 Trend in the percentage of appointments to the board who are women, by size of charity (£ annual income). Horizontal axis: year; vertical axis: percentage of appointments who are women. The first panel presents the overall trend for comparison. The solid line presents the trend; the dashed line provides a comparison to the 50% level.

7 | DISCUSSION

This paper makes an important contribution to the literature on the sociology of work by extending our knowledge about gender inequalities in work to an under-researched sphere of work: volunteering. Volunteering is 'arguably the most ... under-researched type of work in sociology' (Edgell et al., 2016, p. 8). Indeed, while gender inequalities in employment (paid public work) and in domestic and reproductive labour (unpaid private work) are a prominent focus within the sociological literature, gender inequalities in volunteering (unpaid public work) have received much less scholarly attention. This is a significant omission given that the gendered nature of unpaid public work is interesting from a theoretical perspective. Under one theoretical perspective, emphasising the unpaid nature of volunteer work in contrast to paid employment, there is no necessary similarity between unpaid and paid public work in the nature of gender based inequalities (the 'contrast hypothesis'). Indeed from this perspective the more limited opportunities for women in paid employment in business and government may serve to promote the higher participation or 'hyper-involvement' of women in unpaid public work (Themodo, 2009). Under a second theoretical perspective, emphasising the public nature of volunteering in contrast to the private nature of unpaid domestic and reproductive labour, we would expect to find gendered patterns of vertical stratification and horizontal segmentation in unpaid public work comparable to those in paid public employment (the 'spillover' hypothesis).

Importantly we show that gendered inequalities in work extend to public work in general—encompassing unpaid public work, as well as paid public work. Indeed this paper provides the strongest empirical evidence to date which is consistent with the 'spillover hypothesis', which predicts gendered patterns of inequality in unpaid public work comparable to those in paid public work. Specifically, while under the 'contrast hypothesis' there may be institutional,

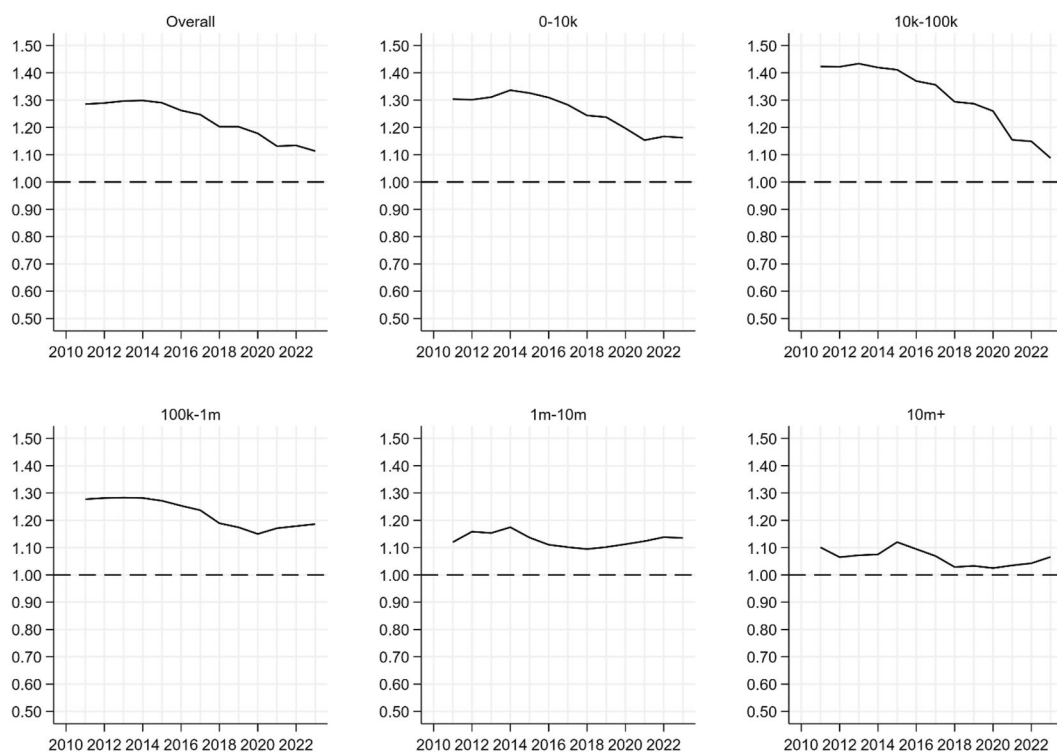
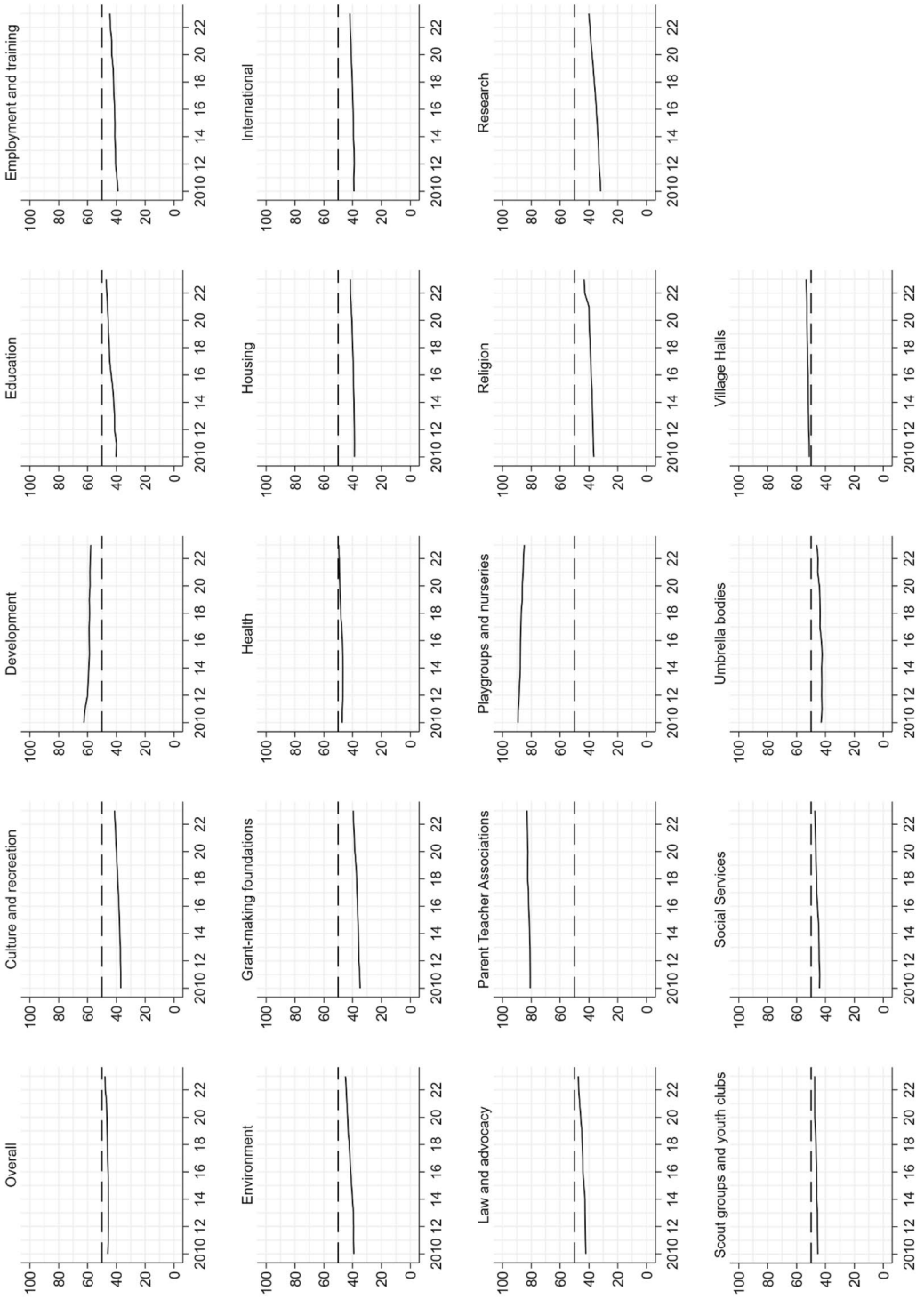


FIGURE 11 Trend in the gender resignation ratio (rate of resignation for women/rate of resignation for men), by size of charity (£ annual income). Horizontal axis: year; vertical axis: ratio expressing rate of resignation from the board for women/rate of resignation from the board for men. The first panel presents the overall trend for comparison. The solid line presents the trend; the dashed line provides a comparison to a ratio of 1 (where the rate of resignation for women = the rate of resignation for men).

structural and cultural reasons for predicting differences between unpaid public work and paid public work in the nature of gender based inequalities—including the way in which unpaid charitable activities have been seen as a context in which women could pursue ‘invisible careers’ and reach senior positions of responsibility traditionally less available in the context of paid employment (Daniels, 1988; McCarthy, 1990)—our results illustrate the salience of vertical gender stratification and horizontal gender segmentation in unpaid public work which resonate with patterns of stratification and segmentation found in paid employment (see Blackburn & Jarman, 2006; Bolton & Muzio, 2007; Bolton & Muzio, 2008; Bushell et al., 2020; Crompton, 2006; Hakim, 1992; Muzio & Tomlinson, 2012; Pilcher, 1999; Powell & Sang, 2015). In terms of segmentation, we find that women are over-represented as trustees in a small number of fields of charitable activity - notably playgroups/nurseries and PTAs - but under-represented across the majority of fields. Therefore—as in paid public work—the kind of unpaid public work that women do is highly gendered: ‘women are condensed in certain feminized specialisms’ (Bolton & Muzio, 2007, p. 54) within unpaid public work, which are characterised as an extension of their expertise in the private, familial, household-related domain (Musick & Wilson, 2008). In terms of stratification, we find that women are almost equally represented among the boards of smaller charities but under-represented on the boards of the largest charities. Therefore—as in paid public work—women are under-represented in what might be understood as ‘senior’ unpaid positions in the charitable sector (Bolton & Muzio, 2007, p. 54). Note that this pattern of under-representation of women in unpaid leadership mirrors the under-representation of women in paid management within larger nonprofits (Lee & Lee, 2021; Lennon, 2013; Sampson & Moore, 2008; Themodo, 2009). Note too that the under-representation of women as trustees of the largest charities is particularly salient given the highly skewed distribution of charities’ income: charities with an income



of at least £1m accounted for 87% of charitable income across the sector in 2021, while charities with an income of at least £10m accounted for 65%. Therefore women are under-represented on boards governing charities that account for the vast majority of aggregate charitable financial resources. Furthermore, we propose a term - 'sequential stratification'—which we argue best describes the way in which layers of gendered stratification interact - within unpaid public work: not only are women under-represented on the boards of the largest charities; but also they are under-represented as chairs of trustee boards; and these dimensions interact such that women are in a particular minority as chairs of the largest charities. Overall—as in the study of paid public work (Powell & Sang, 2015)—we show that even where women are well-represented numerically overall in unpaid public work, vertical stratification and horizontal segmentation remain important.

This paper also extends our understanding about how gendered inequalities in public work are reproduced over time. Recent research within the sociology of work has posed a fundamental question: why do gendered inequalities in work *persist* even as women enter formerly male-dominated occupations? Torre (2017) and Torre and Jacobs (2021) argue that high rates of female attrition from traditionally male occupations serve to reproduce over time gendered inequalities in paid public work. For the first time we test whether this insight also applies to unpaid public work. We find that across the population of charities as a whole, for every year of our analysis period, the percentage of trustee appointments that are women exceeds the percentage of appointments that are men, and that the rate of resignation for women exceeds the rate of resignation for men. Therefore - consistent with the argument of Torre (2017) and Torre and Jacobs (2021) in relation to paid public work - the high resignation rate of women is a key mechanism of continuity amidst continual change: despite significant year-to-year turnover in the population of trustees, it means that the higher number of women being appointed over our analysis period has not translated into women representing the majority of the population of trustees as a whole. Such insight into the longitudinal dynamics underlying the gender composition of trustee boards provides explanatory traction: while there is much focus on the importance of trustee recruitment to an improvement in trustee diversity (Lee et al., 2017), the higher resignation rate of women suggests that there is also a need to focus on the gendered nature of the volunteer experience. Specifically - and given the 'widespread recognition' about the 'challenging' and time-intensive nature of being a member of a trustee board (Lee et al., 2017) - the higher resignation rate of women trustees is consistent with the difficulty of sustaining these demanding volunteer leadership roles within the context of women's other roles, including their disproportionate household and care responsibilities (Fyall & Gazley, 2015). More generally our results lend further support to emerging findings in relation to paid employment within the sociology of work which suggest that gendered inequalities in work are reproduced through institutional and structural factors even after women have entered spells of work. This means that increasing the retention of women, not only the recruitment of women, becomes central to the policy agenda (Torre & Jacobs, 2021).

Finally this paper also serves to extend our knowledge about trends in gender inequalities in public work. Influential work charting the 'stalled gender revolution', describing how progress towards gender equality has slowed (England et al., 2020; Zhu & Grusky, 2022), draws on trends in paid employment showing that declines in occupational segregation by sex are slowing (Blau et al., 2013). However - thus far - this work has not been informed by any understanding of the nature of trends in gendered inequalities in unpaid public work. Given this lack of previous research, our work is important: we show, for the first time, that there has been a decline in gender stratification and gender segmentation in trusteeship since 2010. The decline in stratification—with an increase in the representation of women on the boards of large charities - is particularly noteworthy and worth emphasising: for charities with an income of £1m-£10m, women make up 33.1% of trustees in 2010 and 41.7% of trustees in 2023; for charities with an income of over £10m, women make up 30.2% of trustees in 2010 and 40.3% of trustees in 2023. Our analysis provides insight into the mechanism: rather than a decrease in the gender resignation ratio, there has been an increase

FIGURE 12 Trend in the percentage of board members who are women, by field of charitable activity. horizontal axis: year; vertical axis: percentage of board members who are women. The first panel presents the overall trend for comparison. The solid line presents the trend; the dashed line provides a comparison to the 50% level.

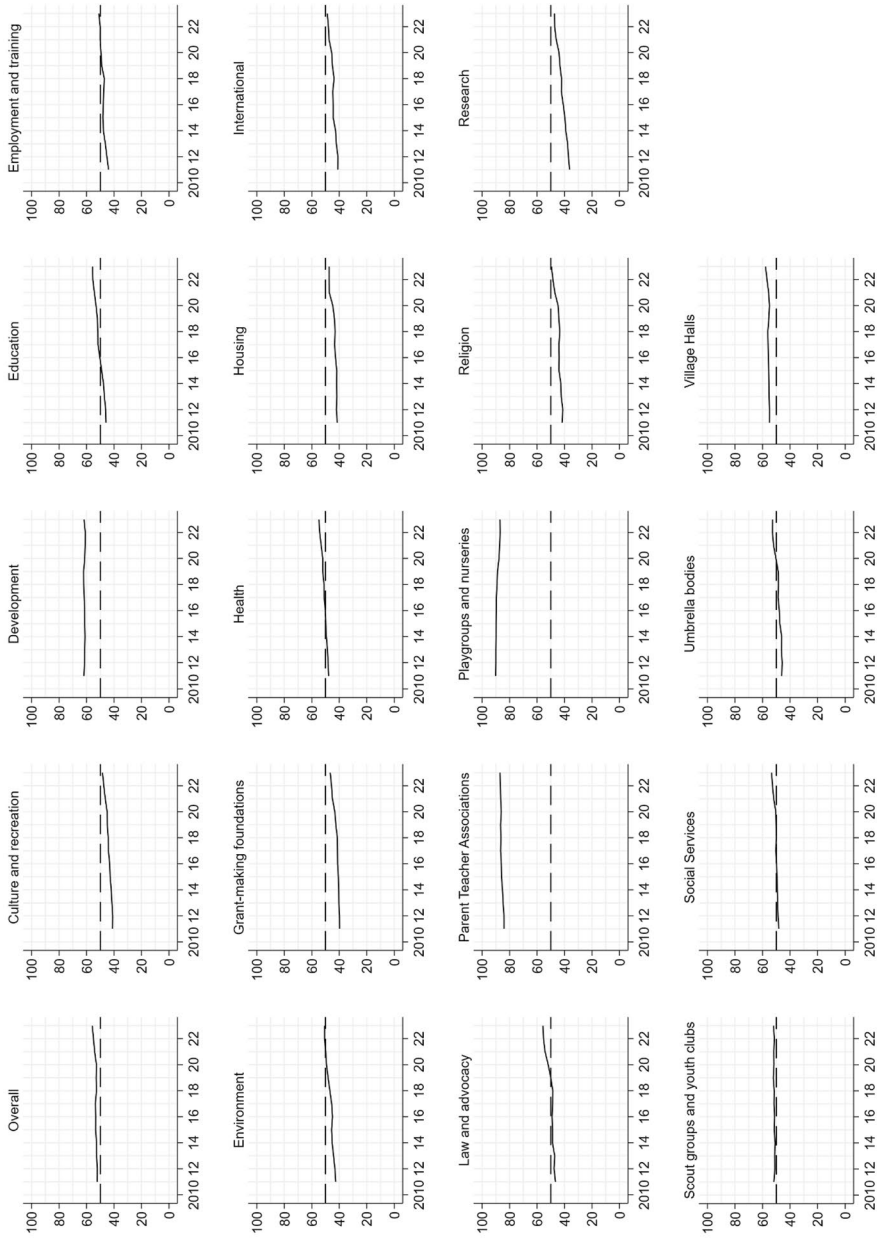


FIGURE 13 Trend in the percentage of appointments to the board who are women, by field of charitable activity. horizontal axis: year; vertical axis: percentage of appointments who are women. The first panel presents the overall trend for comparison. The solid line presents the trend; the dashed line provides a comparison to the 50% level

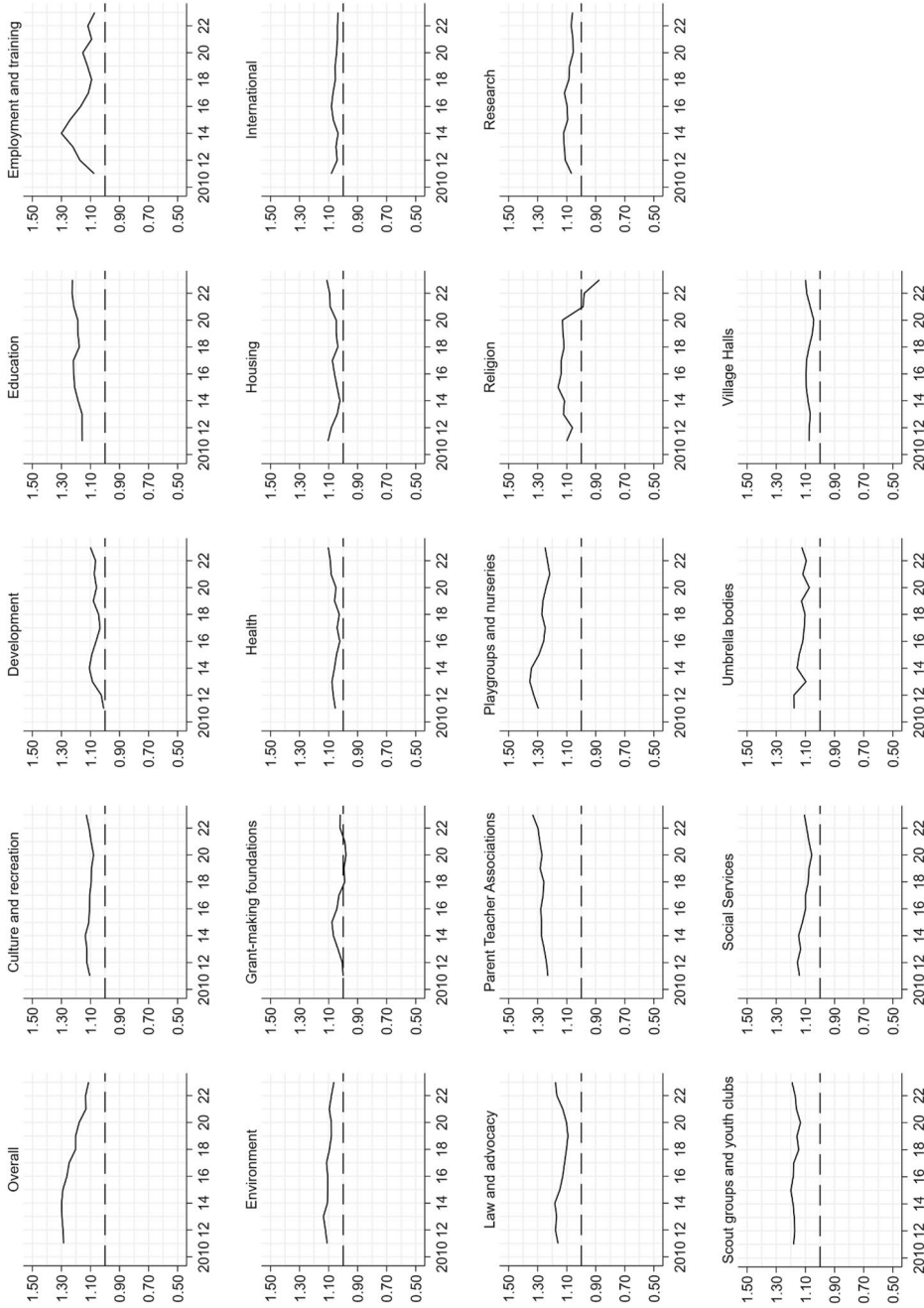


FIGURE 14 Trend in the gender resignation ratio (rate of resignation for women/rate of resignation for men), by field of charitable activity. horizontal axis: year; vertical axis: ratio expressing rate of resignation from the board for women/ rate of resignation from the board for men. The solid line presents the trend; the dashed line provides a comparison to a ratio of 1 (where the rate of resignation for women=the rate of resignation for men).

in the percentage of women being appointed: from 37.7% to 49.7% for charities with an income of £1m–£10m, and from 33.2% to 46.3% for charities with an income of over £10m. Establishing the reasons underlying this increase in appointments is an important topic for further research. One possibility is that it reflects a response to pressures in the institutional environment. From this perspective the increase in the appointment of women may be seen as a response to the increased policy focus on trustee diversity - given that diversity has become increasingly prominent on the voluntary sector agenda - and the need to signal compliance with this new institutional order for legitimacy vis-à-vis external constituencies. More generally our analysis of the decline in stratification and segmentation represents a response to Risman's (2018:37–38) call 'relating to the need to also study change and emerging equality when it occurs rather than only documenting [gender] inequality'. It also represents an interesting counterpoint to accounts that the decline in gendered occupational segregation in paid employment is slowing (Blau et al., 2013; England et al., 2020). We note that a longer time series of data on trends in gendered inequalities in unpaid public work would be needed for a comprehensive comparison to trends in gendered inequalities in paid public work. Nevertheless we argue that discussions about the 'stalled gender revolution' would be usefully informed by considering unpaid public work as well as paid employment and unpaid private work.

The analysis in this paper has limitations. First, we are only able to examine the gender composition of trustees—and not other dimensions of composition, including ethnicity, age, sexuality, disability, and socioeconomic background. Second, we are therefore also unable to consider how - for example, - ethnicity may moderate the gender composition of boards (Musick & Wilson, 2008) through examining the intersection of gender and ethnicity (see Brynin et al., 2019). Therefore a key area for future research is to explore the way gender inequalities in board composition may be manifested differently for women in various social locations. Third, our analysis does not consider the representation and experiences of trans and gender non-conforming people. Fourth, while our analysis considers the board composition of women, this is a necessary but not sufficient condition for recognition. Instead as Kay, 2022 (2022, p. 3) emphasises in relation to corporate boards, 'it's... [also] about whether the organisation has created a culture, and an operating structure where there is parity, not of representation but recognition—are women's voices heard? Do they hold sway? Are their decisions actioned?'

Overall, and notwithstanding these limitations, our findings have important implications for the study of work. Thus far—as Overgaard (2019, p. 129) points out—the study of paid public work and unpaid public work have largely proceeded 'independently'. We follow Overgaard (2019) in recommending linking more closely together the study of volunteering and the study of paid employment, particularly in relation to how inequalities by gender, and other protected characteristics, are manifested across these different types of work. Indeed—as this paper has shown—there is an empirical rationale for a greater focus on volunteering alongside paid employment in research on gendered inequalities within the sociology of work. First, the salience of vertical gender stratification and horizontal gender segmentation in trusteeship shows that gendered inequalities in work extend to public work in general—encompassing unpaid public work, as well as paid public work. Second, the dynamics underlying gendered differences in unpaid work, which show higher rates of resignation for women trustees, resonate with research on paid employment which emphasises the importance of attrition to an understanding of how gendered inequalities in work are reproduced. Third, the decline in gendered inequalities in trusteeship over time provide an interesting counterpoint to existing research documenting a 'stall' in the reduction of gendered inequalities in paid employment.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The underlying data on which this paper's analysis is based, the data extract from the Register of Charities, are available for download from the Charity Commission for England and Wales at <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/register/full-register-download>.

ORCID

David Clifford  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5347-0706>

ENDNOTES

- ¹ We use the terms 'board member' and 'trustee' interchangeably to refer to members of the charity's governing body. All members of that body are trustees in UK law whatever they are called (trustees/directors/committee members). Trustees perform a governance role through providing oversight and direction. Indeed, in many ways it is the trustees who constitute the 'very heart' of charitable organisations: charities may or may not involve volunteers in 'operational' roles, have members, or receive charitable donations, but they cannot be understood to be part of the charitable sector without voluntary involvement in the governing board (Harris, 2001, p. 171). Moreover, since most charities employ no staff and report few volunteers outside of the board (Lee et al., 2017), board members often play both a governance and an executive role: in an estimated 80% of charities, in the absence of staff and other volunteers, board members rely predominantly on themselves to deliver the charity's activities (Lee et al., 2017). Charitable trustees are unpaid. A rare exception is where a trustee is also a charity employee. Less than 2% of charities report paying their trustees in this way (Lee et al., 2017).
- ² Charitable status is the primary framework for voluntary activity in the UK.
- ³ The online Supporting Information provides further substantive context: it describes the significant concern about the representativeness of the volunteer leadership of the charitable sector; and explains why gender inequalities in trustee boards may be important.
- ⁴ GenderChecker lists a name as unisex for names used by both men and women. 7% of the names on the database are 'unisex', with 93% of names exclusively used by either men or women.
- ⁵ Titles for men include 'mr'/'mister'/'sir'/'Lord'/'brother'/'father'; titles for women include 'mrs'/'miss'/'dame'/'baroness'/'countess'/'lady'.
- ⁶ The 5% of trustees where gender could not be identified represent, for example, unisex names without gendered titles.
- ⁷ The annual income distribution across the population of charities is highly positively skewed. Therefore we follow established practice in research on the charitable sector—for example, in Martin et al.'s (2021) 'Civil Society Almanac'—by considering annual income size categories on a multiplicative scale (£0–10k; £10–100k; £100k–1 m; £1–10 m; £10m+).
- ⁸ We use the term 'resignation' in the general sense of leaving the board—whether at the end of an office term or through resigning before a term is completed.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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